

SANYAS ASHRAM: A BRIEF DISCUSSION

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ORDER OF RENOUNCED LIFE OF MAHAPRABHU

A brief discussion on different sannyas-ashrama: Sanyasa is the fourth stage of the four ashramas prevalent in Sanatana Dharma / society. These four asramas are: Brahmachari, Household / Grihastha, Banaprastha and sanyas. However, one can by the grace of his Guru and Gauranga can attain the sanyasa ashrama from his educational stage. Some may attain this (sanyasa) stage from Grihastha / household ashrama etc. There is also a stage called Paramhansa which can be attained after sanyas. They are usually called Babaji. As for example, Srila Bhakti Sidhanta Svaraswati Thakura had a disciple like this. His name was Krishna Das Babaji. We have also at least two Babaji's namely, Gour Kishore Das Babaji, Sri Jagannath Das Babaji in the row of our guru parampara.

There are four self sanyasis. They are as follows:

(i) Dari sanyasi: This is a worst type of sanyasi. They claim renounced order of life inspite they enjoy conjugal life with a woman. Some of them also have children. Generally, they go here and there to collect money and other things for their livelihood.

(ii) Akdandi Sanyasi: Akdandi means the renounced person bears only a straight danda with one head. Moreover, this type of Sanyasi has the only intention / motive of his own salvation only from this mundane world. Although in the sastra this type of sannasis has been prohibited, still a large number of such type of sannasis are seen / prevail in the society. Except vaisnava sannnyases, this type is prevalent in the practical society.

[Footnote] 1. Dari means who has married in spite he entered into a renounced order of life.

(iii) Kshetra Sannas: The man / person who declare his renounced order of life in a particular place and live / stay there until his departure is called Ksetra sannnyas. He cannot move anywhere from the place where he was initiated into sannnyas. As for example, Srila Gadadhar Das took this type of sannnyas in Puri dham.

(iv) Tridandi sannyas: Here the Sannyasa danda has three heads on the top. These heads are resembling three things: the sannyasi at the time of taking sannyas promises that he will serve the almighty Krishna through his body, mind and preaching.

[Footnote] 2. Gadadhar Das was a close associate of Caitanya Mahaprabhu. He is one of the Pancha Tattva. He was also the disciple of Pundarik Vidyanidhi. Gadadhar Prabhu's most famous disciple was Bilvamangal (Lilasukha)

Before the advent of Shankaracharya, the tridandi sannyas order was existed in the vaisnava line of Sri Vishnusvami. In the vishnusvami vaisnava Sampradaya, there are ten (10) different kinds of sannyas names and 108 different names for sannyasis who accept the tridanda, the triple staff of sannyas.

But at the time of Shankaracharya, who was a veteran Vedanist inclined to impersonalism and preached the philosophy of monism, the sect of panchopasakas (those who worship five deities such as Visnu, Durga, Mahadev, Ganesh and so on). Since then, the system of Panchopasakas became prominent in India. Caitanya Mahaprabhu also accepted Vedic sannyasa from the Sankara Sampradaya which uses ten names for their sannyas.

[Footnote] 3. Vishnusvami was a renowned Rudra Sampradaya Vaisnava.

In the ancient India, many Aryans who were the followers of Vedas became followers of Shankaracharya known as Panchopasakas under the guidance of the above Sampradaya. There were ten names of the Shankara sannyas which are as follows:-

(i) Tirtha

(ii) Asrama

(iii) Vana

(iv) Aranya

(v) Giri

(vi) Parvata

(vii) Sagara

(viii) Sarasvati

(ix) Bharati and

(x) Puri

The title and abode of each sannyasi and brahmacaries is as follows:

Sannyasis with the title of Tirtha and Asrama generally stay at Dvaraka and their brahmacari name is svarupa.

Those who are known by the names Vana and Aranya stay at Purusottama or Jagannath Puri and their brahmacari name is Prakasa.

Those with the names Giri, Parvata and Sagara generally stay at Badarikasrama. Their brahmacari name is Ananda.

Those with the titles of Sarasvati, Bharti and Puri generally live in Sringeri in India and their brahmacari name is Caitanya.

2. MAHAPRABHU TOOK SANNYASA INITIATION FROM KESAVA BHARATI OF KATUA-BARDHAWAN

Lord Caitanya accepted the renounced order of life at the age of twenty-four. He took His sannyas initiation from Keshav Bharati. [.....] After initiation, His name becomes Sri Krsna Caitanya. It is usually argued by the quarters of Ak-dandi sannyasi and some of them prefers to call Caitannya Mahaprabhu as Sri Krishna Caitanya Bharati, after the name of Keshava Bharati. (Sri Sri Caitanyadev written by Swami Saradeshananda, Ramakrishna Math, 2006). But few things should be noted here as follows:-

(i) First of all, although, to some extent, hastily and surprisingly, He took sanyas, the Lord did not change His former name Sri Krishna Caitanya. Thus if he had been the follower of Bharati sampradaya in the chain of Shankaracarya, He cannot be called a nirviseshbadi [4] in the Shankar tradition.

(ii) Secondly, those who remember His pastimes did not mention that the Lord ever identified Himself as a monk of the Bharti Sampradaya.

Footnote: [4]: Nirviseshbadi: Those who think that God is formless. He is impersonal and have nothing to do with this material world.

(iii) Thirdly, although at the time of initiation. He tells the sannyas mantra in the ear of Bharati which is repeated by Bharati later on. So, who is the real Guru? This is a genuine question and in the real sense, Caitanya Mahaprabhu took His own mantra, Bharati Maharaj was the medium only. So the question of taking / bearing the title after His sannyas name does not arise.

(iv) Fourthly, at the time of initiation, He was given Ak-danda as a symbol of renunciation. But after some months, when He was going to Puri Dham along with Nityananda Prabhu and some other close associates, Nityananda Prabhu broke His danda into three parts and threw those in the river. Now it is clear that He was not an Ak-dandi sannyasi, rather a tri-dandi sannyasi.

(v) Lastly, although sannyasi in the Shankara tradition thinks himself as the Supreme Lord, Caitanya Mahaprabhu did never think Himself so. Instead, He considered Himself as an eternal servant of Lord Krishna.

After initiation, Caitanya Mahaprabhu at one time went to Nilachal (Puri dham). He stayed there for sometime and after sometime he traveled to different places in India for six years. After the travel, he returned to Puridham again and remained there for the last eighteen years of His life.

During His sannyas life, He always follows the precedators in taking decisions in any matter. A renounced person have to follow and practice different rules and regulations in his life in order to keep himself from possible falldown from his position. Some of these will be revealed from the following discussions.

3. BALLAVHABHATTA AND CAITANYA MAHAPRABHU:

Vallabha Bhatta was a very great Vaisnava scholar who got his initiation from Gadadhar Pandit (C.C. Antya, Chapter 7 test 167). [5] But he was very much proud of his vast knowledge.

Footnote [5] C.C. means Caitanya Caritamrta. C.Bh. means Caitanya Bhagvat.

Mahaprabhu does not like proud people. Now what should be the lifestyle of a pure devotee of the personality of Godhead Krishna? Mahaprabhu wrote 8 verses known as Shikshastakam wherein He gave the necessary guidance to be followed by a Krishna devotee. The third one of the Shikshastakam is:

“Trinadapi sunichen taroapi sahisnuna

A-manina man den kirtania sada hari.”

(Shikshastakam, verse 3)

The above verse indicates that anyone who wants to be a real devotee should be polite more than the grass, and must five lowest level of man the highest level of praise and then he should go ahead for always chanting the name of Hari.

But Vallabha Bhatta was not a person having the above qualities. Rather he was very much proud of his knowledge based on scriptures only. After personal contact Mahaprabhu understood the proud mood of Bhatta and decided to teach him.

From the 7th chapter of Antya Lila of Caitanya Caritamrita we see that the Lord, through some spiritual joking, gave several lessons to Vallava Bhatta which are as follows:

Each year many devotees from Bengal came to meet Mahaprabhu in Jagannath Puri. In one year Vallava Bhatta also came to see and meet those devotees there. After arrival, he very humbly began to speak that he desired to see Mahaprabhu and His close associates. Now Jagannath has fulfilled his desire. Then he began to praise Mahaprabhu and His associates like Nityananda, Advaita, Jagadananda and so on. Hearing his praises, Mahaprabhu said:

“Mahaprabhu kahe, suna bhatta mahamati
mayavadi sanniyasi ami, na jani Krishna-bhakti.”

(C.C. Antya chapter 7 text 18)

That is Mahaprabhu told Bhatta that He is a mayavadi sanniyasi having no Krishna bhakti. This expresses the simplicity of Mahaprabhu although He was the almighty Himself. Moreover, unnecessary praise for a person is not a good behavior on the part of another - Mahaprabhu revealed this indirectly, but Bhatta did not understand this. To show him non-worthy, Mahaprabhu mentioned the names of Ramananda Roy, Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya etc from whom He comes to know the Krishna consciousness. Such was the high qualities of Mahaprabhu.

One day after the Rathayatra of Sri Jagannath, Vallava Bhatta came to Mahaprabhu and submitted a request at the lotus feet of the Lord as such:

“Bhagavater tika kichu kariyachi likhana
Apne mahaprabhu jadi karena sravana.”

(C.C. Antya chapter 7 text 81)

That means Bhatta said that he has written a tika (a clear but a short explanation of a verse or a book etc so that ordinary people can understand) on Bhagavatam and requested the Lord to hear it. But Mahaprabhu replied that He does not understand the meaning of Bhagavatam. Moreover, He is not a suitable or appropriate person to hear such an

auspicious and valuable Book. He further said that He recite Krishna nama and even then He cannot complete His prescribed chanting. Hearing this out of proud Vallava Bhatta said, “I have tried to describe elaborately the meaning of Krishna’s names. Kindly hear the explanation.”

Mahaprabhu at once said, “I do not accept many different meaning for the Holy name of Krishna. I know only that Lord Krishna is Syamasundara and Yasodanandana. That’s all I know. Although Mahaprabhu knew Vallava Bhatta’s explanation because He was omniscient. He did not care about the explanation of Krishna’s name and Srimad Bhagavatam. Mahaprabhu rigidly declined to hear Bhatta’s explanations: As a result, Bhatta went to the house of Gadadhar Pandit hoping that in one day due to Pandit’s request all will hear his explanations. Gadadhar on being repeated request heard his explanation but with fear and suspicion that one day Mahaprabhu will come to know all of this.

Vallava Bhatta used to come everyday and request to hear his explanation on Srimad Bhagavatam, but none present there have any interest to listen to him.

Being frustrated, one day Bhatta asked Advaita Acarya:

“Every living entity is prakriti (female) and consider Krishna her pati (husband). He further said that it is the duty of a chaste wife not to utter the name of her husband, but all of you chant the name of Krishna. How can this be called a religious principle?” Advaita Acarya advised him to ask Mahaprabhu for its reason. Hearing this, Mahaprabhu said: “It is the order of Pati to chant his name. So we chant His name always and minutely.”

[Bengali text of the above answer:

“Patria ajna-nirantara tantra nama

Patira ajna pati-vrata na pare langite.”

(C.C. Antya chapter 7 text 107)]

Hearing this, Bhatta returned home with sorrow and frustration. In another day, Bhatta came and said -

“Bhagavate Svamira vyakhyana karachi khandana

Taite na pari tantra vyakhyana-vacana.”

(C.C. Antya chapter 7 text 113)

The English translation of the text is: “I have nullified the explanation of Svami (Sridhar Svamipad who was a great commentator on Srimad Bhagavatam.” His tika / short note on the different verses of Bhagavatam is known as Bhabartha Dipika. Mahaprabhu recognized only this and instructed His followers not to write a separate one without following Sridhar Svamipada’s explanation.) and claimed a new version of explanation. He further said that whatever Sridhar Svamipad reads he explained according to the circumstances. Thus he is inconsistent in his explanation. As such that cannot be accepted as an authoritative explanation. Mahaprabhu at once said-

“Prabhu hasi kahe - svami na mane yei jana

Vesyara bhitare tara kariye ganan”

(C.C. Antya chapter 7 text 114)

Mahaprabhu here said: “One who does not accept the svami (husband) as an authority, I consider him a prostitute. After saying this, Mahaprabhu was very grave. All devotees becomes happy that the Lord destroys the so-called literary abhiman (proud). This teachings of Mahaprabhu exemplifies that none should be proud of his so-called education and wisdom which makes false-ego in his mind.

4. RAMACHANDRA PURI AND MAHAPRABHU

Ramachandra Puri was a disciple of Madhavendra Puri, the great and generous vaisnava. In Spite of having such a Guru, Ramchandra Puri’s character was that first of all he would induce someone to eat more and then criticize the person for overeating.

Although initiated from Madhavendra Puri, later on, he became a nirvishesbadi. He was so idiot that he advised Madhavendra Puri before his disappearance without any fear he was dare to say Madhavendra Puri that he is in full transcendental bliss and as such he should remember only Brahman instead of crying for Krishna. This was a great offense on his part and as such Madhavendra Puri said, get out, you sinful rascal. Such was the character of Ramachandra Puri.

There was no certainty of where Ramchandra Puri would take his meal for he would do so even uninvited. Nevertheless, he was very particular to account of how others were taking their meals.

Caitanya Mahaprabhu's meals would cost only 320 kaudis (small conchshells that were used as money / medium of exchange at that time). This would provide lunch for three persons: Mahaprabhu, Kasisvara and Gobinda (two servants of Mahaprabhu). Every day the lord would take His meal at a different place and if

SYMPTOMS OF A SANYASI

It is said in the Brahmabaivarta Purana (Sree Krishna Janma Kanda) that sacrifice of body, mind speech etc. unto the lotus feet of Sree Hari and leaving all attachments to wife, sons and daughter, relatives, etc. are the symptoms of a sanyasi. A real sanyasi considers and observes all things at equal footing. He is free from envy and illusion and also will be free from any anger and proud. In Vaisnavite language, Sanyasi is called a Vikshu(as like as a beggar). By Vikshu means a person who leads his life by begging from door to door and devoted himself to deliver the glories of the name of the Lord.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION ON TRIDANDHA SANYASA

Since we belong to Gaudiya Vaishnava sect an additional dicussion is made here to clarify the Tridandhi Sanyasa. In simple language language we can say that when 3 bamboo sticks are tied together and then convered with saffron cloth it is called Tridanda. But the minimum height of this Danda must be equal to that of the Sanyasi. By Tridandi means a person who has full control over his body, mind and speech. However, in practice sometimes Tridandi Vikshu or Sanyasi use a fat bamboo stick which is considered as a bunch of thrice bamboo sticks. From different Puranas and Smriti sastras we see different rules and regulations in case of renounce. As for example, Shandilla Muni (Shandilla Smriti Sastra) said- a Sanyasi would take the dandas according to prescribed rules and regulations and preserve the same. Aitri Muni (Aitri Smriti Sastra) has said: the symptoms of Vaisnavas are that they would the Tridandas in pure mentality because a sanyasi will be examined by his Tridanda. On the otherhand Dattatreya Muni (in his Smiriti Sastra) said: Tridandidhari is considered as good as Narayana. This is why a man who worship a Tridandi Sanyasi would be considered if he worship the Vishnu.

Again in Padma Purna it is said: Tridandi Sanyasi who wear one or two clothes having Shikha on head, paita in body and Kamundula at hand, can be pure devotee of the Lord. (Padma Purana Sarga Khand, Adi 31). He also gets the lotus feet of the Lord after his death.

In the Skanda Purana, a discussion has been made about the mode of performance of Tridandi Sanyasi as : Tridandi Sanyasi has to take Kamundola at hand shikha on his head and paita in his body. He must wear saffron clothes and will have to chant Gaitri Mantra always.

Sridhar Swamipada in his Bhavartha Dipika considered the Tridandi Vaisnavas as most respectable persons in the world. (Bhavartha Dipika 10.86.33).Sri Mansi expressed the symptoms of Tridandi Sanyasi as the man who has been successful in controlling his body, mind and speech can be considered to be a real Tridandi Sanyasi.(Manu Samhita 12.10)

According to Srila Rupa Goswami a Tridandi Sanyasi must have the following qualities:-

- (i) He can control his words.
- (ii) Can control the mind.
- (iii) Can control the anger.
- (iv) Can control the tongue.
- (v) Can control his appetite.
- (vi) Can control sexual urge.(Upadeshamrta)

Again in Nector of Devotion he said: an ideal/real Tridandi Sanyasi must think himself as a servant of the Lord and accordingly he would pay proper devotional services unto the lotus feet of the Lord.

STAGES OF SANYASA

Generally anyone who wants to enter into the Sanyas Ashrama, he would be required to take initiation from a real sanyasi in accordance with vedic rules and regulations. Before initiation he has to cut hairs on his head completely, wear saffron clothes and after initiation he has to bear a tridanda as a symbol of sanyasa. Henceforth he does not maintain any relation with parents, wife(if any), sons-daughter relatives, friends,etc. In this stage if wife exists she has to be treated as a widow.(Vida Srila Swatsvarupa Das Goswami- Elements of Vedic Thought and Culture).

There are four stages of Sannyas which one as follows:

(i) Kutichaka(Ashram Darma-Mains): A monk when resides in a cottage is called Kutichaka. In the practical world bondage with the house is very much strong. As such the new monk/sanyasi may live in a cottage from some distance of his house. During this time he can take the foodstuffs sent by his family for his livelihood. He should devotee himself for remembering and chanting the name of the Supreme Personality of Godhead at this time.

(ii) Bahudaka(Acquiring knowledge related o sanyasas)- At this stage the monk shall try his best level to acquire knowledge about the Supreme Personality og Godhead. Moreover he will not accept any foodstuff if sent from his house. He will go to different villages/places for preaching Vedic knowlegde regarding God and his related knowledge regarding God and His related knowledges. During this time he will begin his livelihood by using the things collected from begging from different houses.

(iii) Hansa Paribrajakcharya(Pertaining to acquire complete knowledge about Iswara, Jiva, creation of world, etc)- This is the third stage of Sanyas Ashrama. When a monk reaches at this stage he goes through different religious scriptures and books related to God. He surrenders himself unto the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. During this stage he travelled various places and preaches among different types of people for distributing spiritual knowledge about God and related matters.

(iv) Paramshamsa/Inactice(Theory of Parambrahma Tatta) This is the last stage of Sanyasa Ashrama. After reaching this stage the monk understand that he is the servant of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. At this stage he is able to teach the deliver devotional services unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

FORMS OF SANYASI

There are two froms of sanyasi as follows:

“ VAJANANANDI when a monk remains alone and meditate and chants unto the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is called Vajanandi. This type of Sanyasi generally do not accpet any disciple. Even if so, he accepts a very few number of disciples. Gourakishoredas Babaji Maharaj and Jaganathdas Babaji Maharaj are two examples of such of type of Sanyasis.

GOSTHANANDI When a monk accepts disciples is called a gosthanandi. This type of monk becomes paribrajaka-meaning that he travels throughout the world for preaching about the knowledge of the Supreme Personality of God-Head. All sanyasi of ISKCON are like this.

DEBATE REGARDING WEARING OF REDISH CLOTHES BY A MONK

It is alleged from some quarter that a monk should not wear/use red/redish clothes.

Sree Kushal Singha was a disciple of Sree Ramkrishna das Babaji Maharaj. At one time Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura was staying at Joypur of Rajasthan, India. Mr. Kushal Singha was also there. He asked Saraswati Thakura: “ I have seen many Vaishnavas in Vrindavan . All of them were wear with white clothes. None was seen to dress himself with saffron/red colour clothes and bear any danda at their hands. Then how the monks of Gaudiya tradition/sect wear saffron clothes and bear tridanda? Moreover, did Mahaprabhu wear saffron clothes and bear any danda as a symbol of sanyasi? Again I Have seen that among you some wear saffron and someone wear white dresses. What are the reasons behind all these things?”

Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura answered the question of Kushal Singha in this way: During the age of Mahaprabhu Sripad Madhavendrapuri.(Iswara Puri was the guru of Mahaprabhu and Iswara Puri was the disciple wear saffron clothes/dresses. Sree Pravodananda Sarawati and others monks also dresses themselves with saffron clothes.

The six Goswami were Parahansas and as such they did not wear saffron clothes and bear any dandas as a symbol of Sanyasas. In the next period their followers paramhansa vaisnavas, did not consider to maintain the symptoms of Vedic Sanyas. This means that Paramhansa Vaisnavas were not required to use saffron and bear danda as a symptom of sanyasis are not required to wear redish/saffron clothes.

It is a fact that in one sense all Vaisnavas Acayas were Tridandi. Some of them accept tridanda at hand and some other accepted tridanda mentally and all of them rendered services unto the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead(Krishna). Sree Chaitanya Deva(who is Krishna Himself) dressed Himself with saffron clothes.

TIME AND RIGHT TO ENTER INTO SANYASAS ASHRAMA

According to Kurma Purana for determining the time for Sanyasa the following things are to considered:-

- (i) There would arise distastes for all things in the mind.
- (ii) There would be no feelings of happiness and sadness in mind inspite the person is lives in. In other words the person would feel himself as dead. On otherhand, according to Varnashram Darma, after the stage of Vanspratha, one may enter into Snyas Ashrama.

Now we see who has the right to take There are differences of opinion sanyasa as to the right of taking sanyas in different Puranas and Smrti sastras. According to Javal sruti (written by Javal Muni) and Manusamhita (written by Sree Manu) only the Brahmin has the right to take initiation in Sanyasa.

On the otherhand, Rishi(Muni) Yaghabulka was of the opinion that Brahmin has the right to four ashramas, Brahmacharya, Grstha, Vanprastha and Sanyas. Kshatriya has the right to enter into the first three ashramas. The Vaisyas can enter into first two ashramas and Sudras has the right to remain in the first ashrama.

On the otherhand, Sree Madhava Acarya supported the right of first three varnas (Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaisya) to enter into Sanyas Ashrama except Sudras. Hence we see there are differences of opinion as to the right of taking sanyas. However these opposite were synchronised by the Acaryas of next period in the following ways: the prohibited instructions regarding the three varnas except Brahmin are applicable only in the case of wearing saffron clothes and bearing dandas only. Risi Bodhayana also supported this formulae. This it may be said that Brahmins has the rise on four stages of Sanyas Ashrama, Kshatriya and Vaishya have the right to enter into Kutichakand Badhudak stages.

Some Sritisashtra stated that in the age of Kali Yuga Ashwamedha Yaga, Gomedha Yaga and Sanyas, etc. are prohibited. Smrta Pandit Raghuandan Bhattacharjee said his own views on prohibition of sanyas in Kali Yuga. In his Malamastatta he said that in the age of Kali. Sanyas is prohibited for Kshatria and Vaisya. But Kamalkar Bhatta, a noted scholar in Smriti Sastra in his Nirnaya siddantha said that the prohibition is applicable in the case of Tridandi Sanyas only. Further it had been said that unless one is freed from the debted to parents, Devas, Rishis, etc. he is not entitled to enter into Sanyas Ashramas. If any one do so he will fall down. But Srimad Bhagabattam specifically stated that any one who has surrendered to God and render devotional services to him, is automatically freed from the above deeds.(S.B 11.5.41 and S.B 11.18.28). Hence traditional rules and regulations are not applicable to such persons.

Moreover the prohibition for Sanyas Ashrama is applicable for Akdandi, but not for Tridandi Sanyasa. In addition to this , in the Gaudiya tradition before initiation to Sanyas, the concerned person is initiated into Brahmin and after some years (usually this rule is maintained, although exception is also found) he is entitled for Sanyas initiation. Nowadays in the Gaudiya tradition, Bhakti-Sastri and Bhakti Vaibhava are to completed before initiation in Sanyas.

CONCLUSION

After the dissappearance of Mahaprabhu two types of Sanyas are seen in the Gaudiya tradition. One is called atur(Bira) and the other is known as Dhira.

Srila Jiva Goswami and Biswanath Chakravarty thakura have determined the conditions for Atur Sanyas. The man who sacrificed all material things including his wife, sons and daughter (if any), relatives and friends etc. and wishes to sacrifice his body in some spiritual place (Tirtha) is entitled for After Sanyas. On the otherhand the man who are engaged in devotional services to the Lord is called Narottama(Dira). But later on this type of Sanyas is seen more in the Gaudiya Sampradaya.